CHRISTMAS MUSIC
from Medieval and Renaissance Europe
THE SIXTEEN
HARRY CHRISTOPHERS director
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CHRISTMAS MUSIC

from Medieval and Renaissance Europe

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THE SIXTEEN

FIONA CLARKE, RUTH DEAN, SALLY DUNKLEY, MARY SEERS *treble & mean*
ROBIN BARDA, PETER HAYWARD, CHRISTOPHER ROYALL, WILFRID SWANSBOROUGH *alto*
PETER BURROWS, NEIL MACKENZIE, MARK PADMORE, NICOLAS ROBERTSON *tenor*
SIMON BURCHALL, CHRISTOPHER HODGES, FRANCIS STEELE, JEREMY WHITE *bass*

HARRY CHRISTOPHERS *director*

THE CELEBRATION OF CHRISTMAS, as is well known to and very happily accepted by most Christians, is a development from pre-Christian and pagan festivities taking place around the winter solstice. In just the same way the music of Christmas owes many of its origins to the early secular accompaniments to such festivities. The word 'carol', so essentially part of Christmas, sums up the flavour of these medieval origins in its various definitions: first, from the French *carole*, a round-dance with music, later a joyous religious song; also a ring of standing stones, and also an enclosure or study in a cloister. Ezra Pound wrote that as poetry is dead if it departs too far from song, so music is dead if it departs too much from the dance; the essence of the carol, which pervades the choice of music on this record, is of music associated with movement, dance or procession, and music and words which are both popular and ecclesiastical. In medieval times the distinction between sacred and secular was deliberately blurred: there was a continuing need to counter still-pervasive pagan rituals (which might include a round-dance in the churchyard) by keeping the people entertained in their own way and, as has been well expressed, taking 'some of the devil's good tunes and giving them back to God'. Thus many carol tunes we know will first have been sung to 'profane' words; thus too the clergy of Sens Cathedral in France, for example, were explicitly allowed in the fourteenth century to dance, provided they didn't lift their feet too far off the ground.

The principle of the carol is clear: a choral refrain, called 'burden', which begins and ends the piece and alternates with verses sung by one or more solo voices. The verses might often be sung to a modified form of plainsong, melodic enough in itself as we hear in *Puer natus est nobis* [1], from the Roman Missal, though the verse sections of *Nowell, nowell: In Bethlem* [2] are as carefully composed as the refrains—an early example of a 'popular' carol written with a good deal of musical sophistication. The same delicious equivocation between sacred and secular is evident in *Gaudete* [3], drawn from a collection of church and school songs put together by Theodoricus Petri. Brought up in Turku, Finland Petri moved *c*1580 to Rostock in (then) Sweden where he published *Piae Cantiones* in 1582. Consisting of 73 Latin hymns and carols, this is a treasury of medieval tunes and words, most of traditional origin and gathered from all over Germany, Bohemia, and Scandinavia; many currently popular carols (among them *Good King Wenceslas*, to different words) come from this source, which was adapted by the great hymn writer J M Neale after a lone copy of the collection appeared in England in 1853, leading to an invigorating influx of European carol melodies. This sort of frank dance carol, at least half the devil's work one might think, was only a part of the late medieval Christmas story. Alongside it in England were examples of high-powered ecclesiastical settings of religious texts destined to be sung by the professional collegiate or cathedral choirs. Walter Lambe, a scholar at Eton, moved to St George's, Windsor, where in 1479 he became choirmaster to replace Thomas Gossyp who had died that summer of the plague (a reminder of how much more immediate in those days was the need to celebrate while there was time). *Nesciens Mater* [4] uses the plainsong (sung here beforehand) as a cantus firmus, just as earlier carol composers would, but now surrounded with an incandescent tracery of voices, echoing if you like the Perpendicular architecture of Henry VI's Eton (and King's College, Cambridge) Chapel.

Yet another source of medieval Christmas music was the Mystery Play, typical in combining communal participation with powerful literary and musical material—as continues to this day in the northern festivals. Both the

Song of the Nuns of Chester [5] and *Coventry Carol* [6] derive from this tradition, the latter's harmony testifying to a more developed musical technique among the participants. Whether such musical skill could be expected of the scholars of Queen's College, Oxford (*Reginensi atrio*) at the point in the Christmas feast when the boar's head was brought in is debatable; the medieval origins of this processional carol [7] are, however, indisputable, for the accession of James I to the English throne in 1603 saw the demise of the boar from courtly tables, as it was shunned in his native Scotland, being replaced just in time by the turkey from the New World. The carol as such fell into desuetude after Henry VIII's time, until revived by Victorian antiquaries (though one notes that it was carried on in popular usage insidiously enough to have been banned by Cromwell); but the spirit continues in gloriously sophisticated form in church music, exemplified in Tallis's great Responsory for the Feast of the Purification [8], where the ritual echoes of plainsong and polyphony hark back to the structure of the medieval dance.

We talk nowadays of the global village, but this is not the first time in modern history that boundaries have been easily crossed. The 'English' court was until the end of the fourteenth century effectively French, hence the easy accession of *carole* forms; and for some time longer Latin was the common language. And as we know, bush telegraphs work very efficiently. Thus it is not surprising to find that a traditional tune like *Quem pastores* [9], with its elegant dance-like and gracious air, was known early in Britain just as was *In dulci jubilo* [13], first printed here *c*1540. Probably the most famous macaronic (i.e. bilingual) carol we have, *In dulci* enjoys the legend that its writer (words, that is) Henry Suso, a mystic who died in 1366, wrote it at the dictation of an angel, after a dream that he was invited to join in an angelic dance.

Other continental composers joined in the dance too. Jacob Handl was an engaging-sounding character who after working in Melk and Vienna decided to take a sabbatical between 1575/9 travelling in Austria, Moravia, Bohemia and Silesia, living in monasteries and taking the opportunity to 'understand the muse and meditate on the shepherd's pipe'—one of the best comments, as it turns out, on the delightful ambiguity of the 'designer carol' of his age. But he transcends the genre, employing the full vigour of four-part polyphony (*Pueri concinite* [10]), Venetian-style polychoral (*O magnum mysterium* [11]) and beautiful harmonisation of a *Piae Cantiones* tune already popular in Germany (*Resonet in laudibus* [12]). Quite independently, meanwhile, the carol repertoire had been developing elsewhere in Europe, and amongst the rich source of the *villancicos* (literally 'peasant songs') of Spain we find such as *Riu, riu chiu* [14], the title apparently an untranslatable cry such as you find in the songs of the Auvergne, a genuine shepherd song transformed into an irresistible dance. In France, Mouton, native of the Somme area and later chief composer to Francois I (whom he very likely accompanied to the Field of the Cloth of Gold to meet Henry VIII in 1520—such junketings as then went on were not complete without the best possible music) wrote a setting of *Nesciens Mater* [15] which provides a fascinating contrast to Lambe's: still the dazzling contrapuntal skill, as the plainchant melody underpins a quadruple canon, but now replete with calm reflection and gorgeous slow-moving harmony. Finally Lassus, the most celebrated musician in Europe in his time, doyen of the courts of the Netherlands, Italy and Germany, shows in his motet *Omnes de Saba* [16] (collected and published by his sons in 1604), written for two 4-part choirs, that the devil probably loses out on the best tunes in the end.

NICOLAS ROBERTSON © 1987

1 **Puer natus est nobis**, et filius datus est nobis:
cuius imperium super humerum eius:
et vocabitur nomen eius, magni consilii Angelus.
Cantate Domino canticum novum: quia mirabilia fecit.
Gloria Patri, et Fiiio, et Spiritui Sancto.
Sicut erat in principle, et nunc, et semper,
et in saecula saeculorum. Amen.

To us a Boy is born, and to us a Son is given:
his power is upon his shoulder:
and his name will be called Messenger of Great Counsel.
Sing unto the Lord a new song, for he has worked wonders.
Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost.
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.

2 **Nowell, nowell**, to us is born our God, Emmanuel.

In Bethlem that child of life
is born of Mary, maiden and wife;
he is both God and man, take shrift; Nowell.
This Prince of peace shall cease all strife,
and wone with us perpetual.

By his powst this child shall rise;
fro hell he shall take his emprise
and save mankind in this wise; Nowell.
Thus telleth us the prophecies,
herebeforn as they did tell.

3 **Gaudete**, Christus est natus ex Maria Virgine.
Tempus adest gratiae hoc quod optabamus,
Carmina laetitiae devote reddamus.

Rejoice, Christ is born from the Virgin Mary.
At this time of grace and longed-for blessing,
love faithfully offers songs of praise.

Deus homo factus est natura mirante,
Mundus renovatus est a Christo regnante.

In this wonderful birth God is made man:
the world is cleansed through the kingship of Christ.

Ezecheelis porta clausa per transitur,
Unde lux est orta salus invenitur.

Now the gate of heaven opens which to man was closed,
sending forth transforming light through which holiness is found.

Ergo nostra contio psallat iam in lustro,
Benedicat Domino salus regi nostro.

Now therefore we meet in pure songs of joy;
and we bless our Lord, King of Salvation. Translation by F V Hayward

4 **Nesciens Mater** virgo virum peperit
sine dolore salvatorem saeculorum.
Ipsum regem angelorum sola virgo
lactabat ubera de caelo plena.

The Virgin Mother, although she knew not man,
brought forth without pangs the Saviour of the world.
This Virgin alone, with the milk of heaven,
gave suck to the very King of Angels.

5 **Qui creavit caelum**, lully
Nascitur in stabulo, by, by
Rex qui regit saeculum, lully

He who made the starry skies, lully
Sleeping in a manger lies, by, by
Ruler of the centuries, lully

Joseph emit paniculum, by, by
Mater involvit puerum, lully
Et ponit in praesepio, by, by

Joseph brings a garment there, by, by
Mary wraps up her child so fair, lully
Rests him while she sings a prayer, by, by

Inter animalia, lully
lacent mundi gaudia, by, by
Dulcis super omnia, lully

Humbly clad, the King of kings, lully
Joys of heav'n to earth he brings, by, by
Sweet above all earthly things, lully

Lactat mater Domini, by, by
Osculatur parvulum, lully
Et adorat Dominum, by, by

On his mother's breast he lies, by, by
She will kiss him if he cries, lully
Ruler of the earth and skies, by, by

Roga mater filium, lully
Ut det nobis gaudium, by, by
In perenni gloria, lully

Mother, pray thy sweet childing, lully
Us eternal joys to bring, by, by
That his praises we may sing, lully

In sempiterna saecula, by, by
In aeternum et ultra, lully
Det nobis sua gaudia, by, by.

Whilst we run this earthly race, by, by
Then throughout all time and space, lully
May he grant us hope and grace, by, by.

6 **Lully, lulla**, thou little tiny child, by by, lully, lullay.

O sisters too,
how may we do
for to preserve this day
This poor youngling,
for whom we do sing,
by by, lully, lullay?

Herod the king,
in his raging,
charged he hath this day
His men of might,
in his own sight,
all young children to slay.

That woe is me,
poor child for thee!
And ever morn and day,
For thy parting
neither say nor sing,
by by, lully, lullay!

7 **Caput apri defero**, Reddens laudes Domino.

The boar's head I bring, giving praises to God.

The boar's head in hand bear I,
bedecked with bays and rosemary;
And I pray you, my masters, be merry,
Quot estis in convivio: (So many as are in the feast.)

The boar's head, as I understand,
Is the rarest dish in all this land,
which thus bedecked with a gay garland,
Let us *servire cantico*: (Let us serve with a song.)

Our steward hath provided this,
In honour of the King of bliss,
Which on this day to be served is.
In Reginensi atrio: (In the Queen's hall.)

8 **Videte miraculum** matris Domini:
Concepit virgo virilis ignara consortii;
Stans onerata nobili onere Maria:
Et matrem se laetam cognoscit quae se nescit uxorem.
Haec speciosum forma praefiliis hominum castis
concepit miseribus,
et benedicta in aeternum Deum nobis protulit et hominem.
Gloria Patri et Filio et Spiritui Sancto.

Behold the miracle of the Lord's mother:
The virgin conceived unacquainted with man:
Mary heavy with her noble burden:
Pure, she realises she is a joyful mother.
The Virginally conceived Holy Infant of naturalist beauty
Came forth for us into the misery of our wretchedness;
Blessed be the Lord God for ever.
Glory be to the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.

9 **Quem pastores laudavere**,
Quibus angeli dixere,
Absit vobis iam timere.
Natus est Rex gloriae.

The angels spoke
to the praiseworthy shepherds saying
Be not afraid.
born is the King of Glory.

Ad quem magi ambulabant,
Aurum, thus, myrrham portabant,
Haec sincere immolabant
Nato Regi gloriae.

Wise men came
and humbly made their offerings
of gold, frankincense and myrrh
to the Prince of Glory.

Exultemus cum Maria
In caelesti hierachia,
Natum promat voce pia
Dulci cum melodia.

Christo regi, Deo nato
Per Mariam nobis dato,
Merito resonet vere
Laus, honor, et gloria.

Mary, with the Heavenly Host,
joyously proclaims
the Word Incarnate
with sweet and pleasant voice.

Through Mary was given to us
worthily, Christ the King, God Incarnate:
loudly sing
praise, honour and glory.

Translation by F V Hayward

10 **Pueri, concinite**, nato regi psallite,
pia voce dicite apparuit, quem genuit Maria.
Sunt impleta quae praedixit Gabriel:
eia, virgo Deum genuit, quod divina voluit dementia.

In sweetest and sonorous harmony sing the praises of the perfect Child, God our King, born of the Virgin Mary. These things have been fulfilled of which Gabriel spoke: behold, the Virgin begat our Lord, He who came down lovingly in His divine mercy.

11 **O magnum mysterium**
et admirabile sacramentum,
ut animalia viderent Dominum natum
iacentem in praesepio. Noe.

How great a mystery
and wonderful a sacrament
that beasts should see the newborn Lord
lying in a manger. Noe.

12 **Resonet in laudibus** cum iucundis plausibus
Sion cum fidelibus: apparuit quern genuit Maria.
Sunt impleta quae praedixit Gabriel.
Eia, virgo Deum genuit, quod divina voluit dementia.
Hodie apparuit in Israel, ex Maria virgine est natus Rex.

Let Sion resound with the joyfui acclaim of the faithful:
He whom Mary bore has appeared.
Gabriel's prophesies have been fulfilled.
The Virgin has given birth to God as divine mercy willed.
Today a King has appeared in Israel, born of the Virgin Mary.

13 **In dulci jubilo**
Nun singet und seid froh!
Unsers Herzens wonne
Leit in praesepio,
Und leuchtet als die Sonne
Matris in gremio.
Alpha es et O!

In sweet jubilation
Now sing with hearts aglow!
Our delight and pleasure
Lies in a manger,
Like sunshine is our treasure
In his mother's lap.
Thou art Alpha and Omega!

O Iesu parvule
Nach dir ist mir so weh!
Tröst mir mein Gemüte
O puer optime
Durch alle juncfrawen Güte
O princeps gloriae.
Trahe me post te!

O tiny Jesus,
For thee I long alway;
Comfort my heart's blindness,
O best of boys,
With all thy loving kindness,
O prince of glory.
Draw me after thee!

O Patris caritas!
O Nati veritas!
wir wären all verloren
Per nostra crimina

O Love of the Father,
O gentleness of the Son!
Deeply were we stained
Through our sins;

So hat er uns erworben
Caelorum gaudia
Eia, war wir da!

But thou for us hast gained
The joy of heaven.
O that we were there!

Ubi sunt gaudia
Nirgend mehr denn da!
Da die Engel singen
Nova cantica,
Und die Schellen klingen
In regis curia.
Eia, war wir da!

Where are joys
In any place but there?
There are angels singing
New songs,
And the bells are ringing
In the court of the King.
O that we were there!

14 **Riu, riu chiu** la guarda ribera:
Dios guardó el lobo de nuestra cordera.

Riu, riu chiu. The shepherd by the river bank:
God kept the wolf away from our sheep.

El lobo rabioso la quiso morder,
Mas Dios poderoso la supo defender;
Quiso la hazer que no pudiesse pecar,
Ni aún original esta Virgen no tuviera:

The furious wolf attempted to bite her
But all powerful God knew how to protect her:
He wished to make her without sin,
A Virgin unstained even by our first father's fault.

Este qu'es nacido es el gran monarca,
Cristo patriarca de carne vestido;
Ha nos redemido con se hazer chiquito
Aunqu'era infinito, finito se hizera:

This new born babe is the mighty monarch,
Christ the patriarch clothed in flesh:
By making Himself a little child he has redeemed us:
He who was infinite, made himself finite.

Muchas profecías lo han profetizado
Y aún en nuestros dias lo hemos alcançado;
A Dios humanado vemos en el suelo
Y al hombre en el cielo por qu'Él le quisera:

Many a prophesy told of his coming,
And now in our days we have seen them fulfilled:
We see God made man upon the earth
And man in heaven because He so willed.

Yo vi mil garçones que andavan cantando
Por aqui botando haziendo mil sones
Diziendo gascones Gloria sea en el cielo
Y paz en el suelo, pues Jesus nasciera:

I saw a thousand youths coming forward singing in
this place, leaping as they sang a thousand notes:
Chanting 'Gascons, glory be in heaven and peace upon
earth, Since Jesus is born.'

15 **Nesciens Mater**
Please see 4 above for text and translation.

16 **Omnes de Saba** venient, aurum et thus deferentes,
et laudem Domino annuntiantes. Alleluia.
Reges Tharsis et insulae munera efferent;
Reges Arabum et Saba dona adducent. Alleluia.

All they from Sheba shall come: they shall bring gold and incense;
and they shall show forth the praises of the Lord. Alleluia.
The Kings of Tharsis and of the isles shall give Him presents;
the Kings of Arabia and Sheba shall bring gifts. Alleluia.

It will be noticed that the Latin pronunciation differs in various pieces. In keeping with the spirit of this survey of early European Christmas music we have attempted to point up some of the differences between local traditions by employing as far as we can ascertain the pronunciation appropriate to each: English, Italian, German (see especially 'In dulci jubilo') church Latin all probably sounded slightly different. However the overall emphasis has been less on scholastic reconstruction than on conveying the essential festive atmosphere proper to the Christmas spirit itself.

Some other Christmas music available from Hyperion

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Recorded on 7 & 9 May 1987
Recording Engineer ANTONY HOWELL
Recording Producer MARK BROWN
Executive Producer EDWARD PERRY
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Front illustration: *The Adoration of the Magi* by Mattia Preti (1613–1699)
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